

E. coli

FACT SHEET

What is *E. coli*?

E. coli are bacteria that normally live in the intestines of humans and animals. Most strains of these bacteria are harmless, but several strains produce toxins that can cause illness. One particular strain (O157:H7) can cause severe diarrhea and kidney damage.

How is *E. coli* spread?

E. coli is spread when a person ingests the bacteria, either by eating contaminated food, drinking contaminated water or touching a contaminated surface. Undercooked meat can contain *E. coli*. Raw fruits and vegetables and unpasteurized fruit juices may also be contaminated. In addition, *E. coli* can be spread person-to-person when a person doesn't wash his hands after using the restroom or changing a diaper.

What are the symptoms of *E. coli*?

Symptoms of *E. coli* usually develop about three days after a person is exposed to the bacteria. They include stomach cramps and severe diarrhea, and may also include blood in the stool. Some people may have mild symptoms, or no symptoms at all.

Who can get *E. coli*?

Anyone can become ill from *E. coli*. Most people will develop stomach cramps and severe diarrhea. Some people may even have blood in their stool. Senior adults and children under age 5 are more likely to develop severe illness. Children under 5 may develop a serious illness called Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS) which can lead to kidney failure.

What is the best way to protect myself against *E. coli*?

The best protection against *E. coli* is frequent hand washing with soap and water.

- Apply soap and rub hands vigorously under running water for at least 20 seconds.
- Dry with a disposable towel.
- Be sure to wash hands after handling animals or raw meat, after visiting the restroom or changing a diaper and before eating.

What are some other ways I can protect myself from *E. coli*?

Be sure to wash all raw fruits and vegetables thoroughly with water before you eat them. Also, make sure meat is cooked to a recommended internal temperature.

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| • Pork | 145°F |
| • Ground beef | 155°F |
| • Poultry | 165°F |
| • Reheated precooked foods | 165°F |
| • Reheated commercially prepared foods | 140°F |

What should I do if I develop symptoms of *E. coli*?

If you develop stomach cramps and severe diarrhea, contact your health care provider as soon as possible. You will likely be asked to provide information on your symptoms, which foods you have eaten for the past several days and who you have been in close personal contact with. This information will help your local public health department investigate and identify the cause of confirmed *E. coli* bacterial illness and protect others in your family and in your community.